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ABSTRACT

A study skills course at the University of Minnesota Technical College Reading Center involves students by having them determine how study skills work for their situation, by using materials relevant to their academic classes, and by getting them to apply critical thinking to the learning process. Students conduct surveys, develop programs on good study habits for presentation to other students, contribute to a study file, and construct study aids as they develop their study skills. (An extensive bibliography concerning specific study techniques is included.) (TJ)

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SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR COMPETENCY IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

International Reading Association
Seventh World Congress on Reading
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As involvement is the key to so many things, involvement in reading can motivate, stimulate and encourage students to improve their reading and study skills.(13)(25) This paper discusses some techniques to make study skills relevant and interesting to college and high school students. It is based on the premise that when students become actively engrossed in discovering avenues of learning and in making judgments and decisions derived from this learning, they develop flexibility in their ability to cope with academic situations, are curious about life, and have a positive attitude towards the future.

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At the University of Minnesota Technical College (UMC) Reading Center we try to "involve" students by (1) having them determine how study skills work best for their situation, (2) using materials that are relevant to their academic classes, and (3) by getting them to apply critical thinking to the learning process.

Our experience has been that students eschew listening to lectures on effective ways of studying. They will not actively read the most cleverly-written textbook on studying. The result is little enthusiasm for studying or for transfer of study techniques to academic classes. One way to pique interest for study skills at UMC is through interview and survey projects. During one quarter, students conducted surveys and interviews to determine the best places on and off campus to study. Results of the surveys were compiled and culminated in the "Top Ten Study Areas." The findings were reported to the student newspaper and an article appeared just before examination week.

Students also interviewed their peers regarding the number of hours per week students studied and what grades students thought they were getting. In giving their reports, critical analysis was initiated as the student group realized that their findings were subjective. For instance, they pointed out that answers were based on conjecture and there were wide differences in study hours depending on what classes and how many credit hours students were taking.

After discussing their findings, a range of study hours correlating with grades in college was determined. The study skills classes then personally kept track of their study hours and the students compared their hours with the UMC norm. The activity was an eye-opener for many and motivated some to pay more attention to their study schedules.

TABLE I

Correlation of Study Hours and Grades: UMC Fall 1977

12-20 hours	A grades
10-15 hours	B grades
9-7 hours	C grades
6-0 hours	failing grades

As a conclusion, their reports were compared with some of the research done on study time schedules. (1)(5)(7)(9)(16)(23)(30) Students enjoyed seeing where their data corroborated with sophisticated statistical studies.

In conducting these surveys, students learned survey methods, used critical thinking, and practiced written and oral-reporting strategies. Some groups came back as thrilled with the reports they were giving as if they had invented a new approach to studying. Students became involved in learning more about study skills without being preached to about what to do to become a "successful" UMC graduate. Positive feedback was supplied when their suggestions were published in their own student newspaper.

Student input from these projects has led to the development of a slide program on good study habits and good study locations. The program is available to freshmen orientation groups in the International Program, and to faculty and counselors for classroom or workshop sessions. What makes the program unique and relevant is that it is based on student input and is essentially "by and about" UMC students.

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Recognizing that reading and writing skills are closely related, students contribute every quarter to a study file. The compilation of this file is another way to encourage active involvement in study skills.

Students construct study aids that are put into packets according to subject area and course. They are housed in an open bookshelf on wheels (looks like an open file cabinet on its side) and can be moved around the library or taken to any classroom on campus. This study file is a life saver for some and assures that students are applying memory and note-taking techniques to their classes. The file includes: (1) flashcards, (2) copies of lecture notes, (3) student-constructed practice tests, (4) essays on course requirements and assignments. (see Table II) (5) essays on examinations, the primary focus of certain tests, and other study tips from a particular class, and (6) analysis of professors as to lecture format, verbal and non-verbal clues, and suggested note-taking techniques.

TABLE II
revision from Wood, 1978(28)

List name of a professor in one of your classes: _____

Course this professor teaches: _____

Directions: Write an essay about this course that analyzes your responsibilities in the class and suggests what your plans are to fulfill these responsibilities. Include the following topics in this essay. You may consult your syllabus and a dictionary. (Essay on Comm 1062 not acceptable)

1. the most important source of information in the class (textbook, lecture, etc.)
2. sources of information you will need to consult or study besides the book and lecture
3. the reading assignments, length, and when due
4. papers due, how long, what kind of research they will require
5. special project and assignments to complete
6. when the exams are, what type, what they will cover
7. attendance policy
8. what grades are based on
9. outside help available besides the professor to understand the class
10. other information that may be helpful to know (optional) Example: gestures instructor makes in class to let you know what is important for a test.

Each contribution to the file is preceded by demonstrations of applicable techniques and activities to practice the techniques. Memory systems (12) notetaking methods (18)(20)(21) and test-taking tips (2)(15)(17)(22) are discussed. Students analyze a class or course exam and report on how they can apply what they have learned to a particular class.

The existence of this file has initiated faculty as well as student involvement. Instructors drop by to check the file and find out what students perceive is important in their tests and lectures. They often donate study guides, old tests, and worksheets. Teachers of reading are always striving to establish rapport with content area teachers and get them to provide reading and study aids for students. The study file has served as an unobtrusive way to accomplish this. This faculty participation is also another way to encourage involvement by students, who readily tune in to the interest and support their teachers are willing to give.

The "professor-write-ups" (#6 in the study file) grew out of a concern by students that they were not predicting what was important to study. A typical comment was, "I agree, this is a good method of taking lecture notes. But how can we predict test questions or main ideas so that we can underline or star them in our notes?" This led to discussions about the communications process and ways that insturctors have of emphasizing important concepts.(10)(11)(19) Slides of instructors in non-verbal language poses were elicited (again faculty involvement) and students analyzed them and compared their assessments to the taped commentary of the faculty member. What ultimately emerged was a written critique of gestures, vocalics, and other movements that instructors use to denote important concepts in their lectures. In this activity, written, oral, and visual communication was developed along with the application of critical thinking to study skills. The faculty participation

added further credibility and relevance to the study skills curriculum.

To quote an old Chinese proverb: "I hear and I forget
I see and I remember
I do and I understand

The doing, or involvement, is the key. At the University of Minnesota Technical College, involvement is aroused by (1) having students draw their own conclusions regarding study habits through surveys and interviews, (2) having students create their own academic aids in the study file, and (3) by having faculty and students contribute time and information towards dissemation of important course material. We feel that through these means our program adhers to a sound philosophy of reading and learning in developing "a flexibility in the application of skills" and a "coordination with instructors in the academic disciplines." (6)

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